



State of Vermont
Vermont Department of Education
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MEMORANDUM

To: High School Principals
From: Michael Hock, Director of Educational Assessment
Date: March 16, 2009
Subject: **NECAP Science Test - Online Accommodation Tool for High School Students**

The Vermont Department of Education is pleased to announce that *Nimble Tools*, a new and innovative, on-line platform for providing assessment accommodations, will be available to Vermont's 11th graders during the **May 2009 NECAP Science Assessment**. Beginning on March 16th, schools may use the password enclosed with this mailing to access the Nimble Assessment Systems Web site. The Web site includes detailed information on *Nimble Tools*, and a downloadable NECAP Science Practice Test that incorporates the accommodations software. The practice test can be used to orient staff to the *Nimble Tools*, and to try it out with students who may benefit from the accommodations during the actual science test. The password will also provide access to the student registration section of the Web site. Please note that the *Nimble Tools* are available to any students who might benefit from them, free of charge, but schools must register each student on the Nimble Assessment Systems Web site **by April 3rd** in order to access the on-line accommodations platform during the science testing.

This memo provides detailed information on *Nimble Tools* and how high schools can access the program for their students.

Background: The New Hampshire Department of Education, in partnership with Nimble Assessment Systems, Inc, was recently awarded a federal Enhanced Assessment grant to develop and field-test an on-line accommodation tool for large-scale assessment. They have invited their NECAP partner states (VT, RI, and ME) to participate in the project. In addition, eight other interested states (NC, SC, GA, MT, IA, CT, MD, & FL) are joining as observing partners. The grant is aimed at providing a better way for students who need test accommodations to interact with the NECAP test through an on-line computer testing platform that provides participation options that are not possible in a "pencil and paper" format. The project is designed to investigate both the efficacy and large scale feasibility of the technology. Based on the outcome of this investigation, in the future it may possible to provide *Nimble Tools* for students on all tests and at all grade levels.

Nimble Tools was originally designed by educational researchers at Boston College, who recently incorporated themselves to become Nimble Assessment Systems. They were advised by staff at the NH DOE, as well as variety of experts in the fields of assessment and special education. The beta version of *Nimble Tools* was successfully field-tested with New Hampshire students in 2006. Based on this work Nimble Assessment Systems has received several industry awards for their novel applications of technology to solving social and educational problems.

The Software & the Accommodation Tools: The *NimbleTools* computer-based delivery system is designed to provide universal access to test content by embedding accessibility and accommodation tool into an on-line version of the assessment. The accommodations package is tailored to meet a variety of challenges presented by students with special assessment needs.

The following accessibility tools will be available for this May's Grade 11 NECAP Science Assessment:

- ❖ Read Aloud of Text (human voice)
- ❖ Background Music (multiple choices)
- ❖ Magnification (2 types)
- ❖ Color Overlay Choices
- ❖ Reverse Contrast
- ❖ Choice of Font and Background Colors
- ❖ Masking (of distracting text)
- ❖ Allowing Secure & Supervised Breaks (requires mid-session logout and login)
- ❖ Online Science Reference Tools with Accommodations listed above

It is important to note that at this time **ONLY MULTIPLE CHOICE** test items will be included on the *Nimble Tools*. Students will need to complete constructed response items in the regular student response booklet provided by our assessment contractor, Measured Progress. The student response booklet should be returned to Measured Progress in the regular return shipment.

Questions and Answers:

Where do I go to download the NECAP Science Practice Test?

Online at <http://www.nimbletools.com/necap> is an overall project description, details about the student practice period, video/demo orientation files for each accessibility tool, and information about how to register students to participate.

Who can view this site?

The Web site with demos, downloadable practice test (available starting March 16th), and general project information is available to everyone at <http://www.nimbletools.com/necap>. (No password is needed.)

Who may register participating students and assign accommodations?

Access to the School Administrator Tool, which permits student registration and assignment of accommodations to specific students, requires the school's assigned password, enclosed with this mailing. Only staff who are provided password access by the school principal will be able to register students and to use the online School Administrator Access Tools. Each school principal is responsible for securing and assigning the use of this NECAP Test Security password. **Please Note: students must be pre-registered prior to April 3rd to access *Nimble Tools* during the assessment.**

How do we get a password? The password is enclosed with this mailing.

What students are eligible to use the accommodations tools?

Any students with special assessment needs may use the *Nimble Tools*. Students do not need to have an IEP or be eligible for special education. **However, the following criteria must be met in order for a student to participate:**

- 1) Schools must follow the NECAP Accommodations Procedures Policy. This means that any use of the NECAP Science Computer-Based Accommodations Tool must be:
 - ❖ The result of a decision made prior to the test by the educational team that includes the parent or guardian and the student;
 - ❖ Documented at the local level to inform instruction;
 - ❖ Based on the specific needs of an individual student – not a group;
 - ❖ Consistent with accommodations used during the student’s prior instruction and test taking experience (online accommodations are new and therefore may not exactly match prior student experience but should be consistent with that experience) (For more information, see: *NECAP Accommodations Guidelines & Procedures Manual* available at: http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_assessment/necap.html).
- 2) Your school must have enough computers that meet the minimum technology requirements to be able to give the online test beginning at the same time that all other students begin their test. In short, testing all students at the same time is still a requirement. (See details on the project Web site: <http://www.nimbletools.com/necap>.)
- 3) Participating students must already be listed in Measured Progress’s student database. Typically that would mean students who took the 11th grade NECAP tests in fall 2008 and/or were listed in your school’s fall census.

Will the results from the computer-based test count as the official score of record?

YES. Students who take the NECAP Science Test online will produce an official test score based on their responses to this computer version of the test. This is NOT a pilot. The online version and the paper version of the test will both be scored in exactly the same way. Student scores will be assigned and *will count*. It is essential that all participating students, their parents, and school personnel clearly understand this fact when they make their participation decision. We are working hard to make sure this experience is a good one for all concerned, but please remember that this is the first time we have provided this kind of online test delivery. Should students encounter any problems while performing the online version or decide that this is not the right option for them, they will have the option of completing the remaining test sessions on paper. (If this occurs during a test session, contact your VT Department of Education assessment staff for procedural guidance.)

What will participating students experience during the May 2009 NECAP Science test?

Specific administration instructions will be provided in material to be sent later, but here is a brief summary so you’ll know what to expect:

All students, including those participating online, will be assigned a specific Student Test Booklet with a corresponding booklet number, as usual during NECAP testing. Test administrators will be responsible for logging each individual student into and out of each active Web-based test session. Further instructions will be provided in the School Administrator Tools

section of the project Web site, and in printed material to be shipped to your school with the secure test materials.

Students participating online will be able to view and /or hear all test questions directly on the computer, but must also have a regular Student Answer Booklet available to them. Students will answer all Multiple Choice items directly on the computer by clicking their answer choice. However, for this spring's test they will still have to place their Constructed Response answers into the normal NECAP Student Answer Booklet as they usually do.

If needed, these students can also use regular accommodations, like D2: (Student answers on separate paper and school personnel transcribe answer to student answer booklet), or D5: (Student dictates constructed responses and school personnel scribe into test booklet exactly as dictated.) Any approved standard accommodations, as appropriate, may be used, and if used must be documented on page 2 of the Student Answer Booklet in the normal way. Use of the computer accommodation version of the test will be documented by data collected online during administration. All secure test materials (including the secure NECAP Science Test CD) must be returned to MP at the end of the testing window.

Order of Events and Important Dates:

March 16th a beta version of **Nimble Tools** with a set of released Grade 11 NECAP science practice test items will be available at <http://www.nimbletools.com/necap>. Orientations explaining how to use the tools are also available on the site. Students can try out and become familiar with the computer version of the NECAP test in the next few months.

March 16 – April 3rd Students, teachers, and other team members, as appropriate, will have the opportunity to:

- ❖ Explore and become familiar with the accommodation software interface, the on-line accommodations, the NECAP test format, and the school administrator (teacher) tool;
- ❖ Decide - as a team- who will take the computer-delivered NECAP Science Test using individually selected accommodations; and
- ❖ Have students take the NECAP Practice Test *at least two times* using this interface with various combinations of accommodations to decide which tools will be most helpful. Individual students need to become comfortable with this testing format using their chosen accommodations. This is a required step for every participating student and must happen prior to the actual test, but does NOT have to be completed prior to student registration. Feedback from the NH students who worked with an earlier version of this software has shown how important this step is in supporting student performance. You may register a student for use of **Nimble Tools** even if you are not certain the student will choose to use them at time of testing. Students may, at any time, choose to complete the NECAP science test in the normal paper and pencil format. Students can use the practice test through the month of April, but *registration* must be complete by April 3rd.

- ❖ Assign individual accommodations to students. Once you've had a chance to decide what package of accommodations is right for each of your students, using the online Administrator Tool, you can assign and/or change individual student test accommodations from March 16th until the time the student takes the test. Accommodation selection does not have to be completed at the time of student registration. You can work with the tools through the month of April to make your choices. If you have any further questions, please email Jen Higgins at jen@nimbletools.com.

By April 3rd: Schools must register students to participate using the Administrator Tool, (described in greater detail on the project Web site). Students who are not pre-registered will not be permitted to use the online system to take the science test in May. They will have to take the test “the old fashioned way”... by paper and pencil. Registration does *not* lock a student into the online test, but it is the only way it can be made available to that student if needed. Students may still decide to take the paper & pencil version of the test at any time, even after they are registered.

In Early April: Each high school will be mailed a CD version of the science practice test with *Nimble Tools* and can use this CD to load the software onto computers that are not Internet enabled. Schools may keep the practice CDs to use as needed in the future.

By Mid-April: Measured Progress will ship Regular NECAP science materials to schools via UPS. These shipments will include secure (clearly labeled) versions of NECAP Science Test CDs for all schools with participating students. Test administration information specific to the use of the CD version of the test will be provided.

For more information, or if you have questions, contact:

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